

ISRAELI-SYRIAN NEGOTIATIONS: A HISTORIC PERSPECTIVE

The Armistice Agreement

Syria was the last country (after Egypt, Lebanon, and Jordan) to sign an armistice agreement with Israel (July 20, 1949) as empowered by UN Security Council Resolution 62.

The armistice with Syria established several demilitarized zones. Syria agreed to withdraw its troops from Mishmar Hayarden, but not from other areas that they had acquired by force. The sides could not agree on sovereignty in these areas, so the question of sovereignty was left unsettled with both sides claiming sovereignty of these areas. In theory, both sides were free to cultivate portions of the demilitarized zones (DMZs) that were allotted to them, regardless of sovereignty. In practice, Israeli attempts to cultivate the DMZ resulted in Syrian shelling of Israeli farmers and of villages and kibbutzim inside the Green Line. The armistice borders with Syria were redrawn when Israel captured the Golan Heights in the 1967 Six Day War, and redrawn again in the wake of the 1973 Yom Kippur (October) war. In 1976, the so-called "Red Lines" agreement was a tacit understanding between Damascus and Jerusalem in which Israel and Syria recognized each other's security interests in Lebanon.

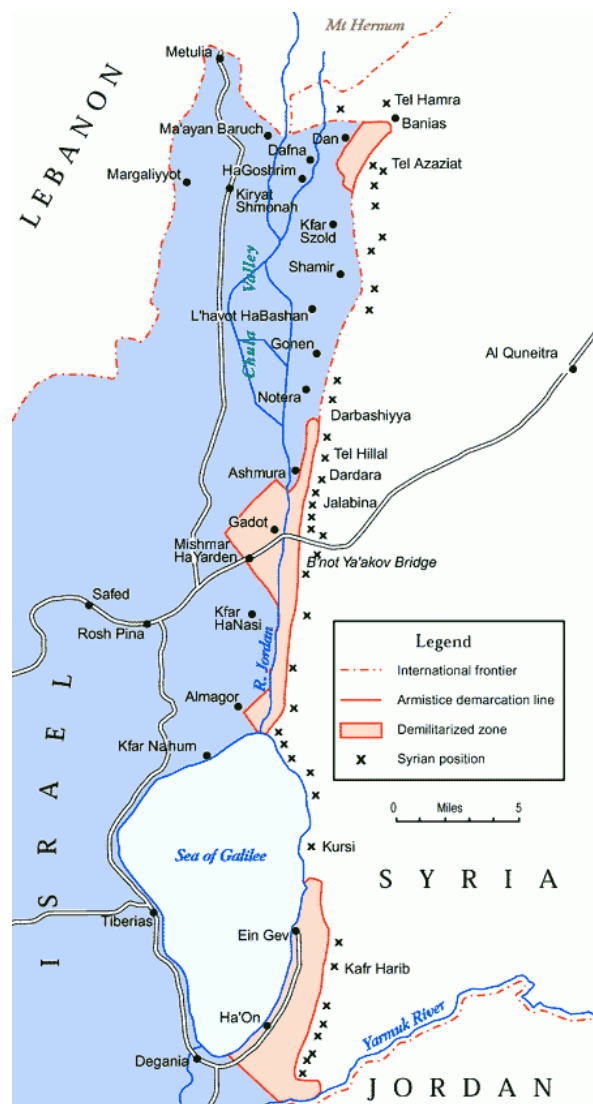
Negotiations during the 1990s

Talks between Israeli and Syrian delegations in 1994 and 1995, based on the Madrid Conference, were supported by the involvement of high-ranking U.S. officials, including meetings between President Clinton and President Assad. The Israeli negotiators accepted the principle of withdrawal on the Golan Heights, **in the context of a peace a settlement that simultaneously addresses four key issues:**

- The depth of the withdrawal;
 - The schedule and duration for withdrawal;
 - The stages of the withdrawal and the linkage between them and normalization;
- Israel insisted that there be an extended phase of normalization -- open borders and embassies -- before completion of withdrawal to a yet undetermined line, and;
- Agreement over security arrangements.

The late Prime Minister Rabin stated that should a peace treaty including a significant withdrawal from the Golan Heights be negotiated with Syria, the proposed treaty would be put to a national referendum before it is signed. Both sides agreed that the talks laid a solid basis for further discussions but talks did not resume until 1996 despite overtures by Prime Ministers Netanyahu and Barak. The talks faltered following terror attacks by Hamas and Hizbullah in March and April 1996, partly inspired, if not aided, by the Syrians.

In December, 1999, President Clinton announced that Prime Minister Barak and President Assad agreed that the Israel-Syrian peace negotiations would be resumed from the point that they were halted in January 1996. Assad dropped his demand that Israel commit in advance to withdrawal from all of the Golan Heights. The talks stalled



1949 Armistice Lines

in January due to Syria's demand that Israel define the new border prior to reaching agreement on other key security issues.

Developments effecting current Israel-Syrian negotiations

Syria has long standing relationships with Iran, Hizbullah, and Hamas. In 2004, Iran and Syria signed a mutual defense treaty, agreeing to support the other if they were attacked by any foreign nation. In addition to these political relationships, Syria hosts many Iranian tourists each year as well as accepting millions of dollars of Iranian donations each year for mosque construction projects. Their renewed relationship has made Syria a pipeline between Iran and southern Lebanon in which money and supplies are sent. Syria is also thought to be supplying weapons to Hizbullah directly. In 2006, Iran and Syria worked jointly to rearm Hizbullah after the war with Israel. In addition, in recent years, Syria has served as a meeting ground for Iranian and Hizbullah officials.

Syrian-Hamas relations were strained from Hamas' inception until the mid-1990's due to ideological differences. In 1994 Hamas officials met with top Syrian officials, and since that time Damascus has served as the operational headquarters for the military wing of Hamas. Syria has served as a transportation network for supplies and weapons for Hamas and many top Hamas officials reside in Syria and are protected by Syrian security.

Recent developments

On September 6, 2007, the Israeli air force destroyed a Syrian nuclear reactor site hidden in a canyon in a remote area of the Syrian desert. U.S. officials stated that the facility, named al-Kibar, was a covert nuclear reactor built with North Korean assistance that was intended to produce plutonium for nuclear weapons. Syria is in non-compliance with a safeguards agreement in force with the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA), which required Syria to provide the agency with design information on any nuclear facilities "well before construction actually begins." After the building was bombed, Syria moved quickly to cover up their covert nuclear activities. A February, 2009 report by the IAEA stated that inspectors found graphite as well as further uranium traces in test samples taken from the bombed site. Syria has not cooperated with documentation or by granting further access for IAEA inspectors to the bombed location and three other suspect locations.

In 2008, after an 8 year hiatus in negotiations between the two countries, Israel participated in indirect talks with Syria mediated by Turkey. By the end of July 2008, while Prime Minister Olmert pushed for direct negotiations, another round of Turkish mediated indirect negotiations was scheduled. Israel would like to see a break in relations between Syria and Hamas and Hizbullah, and a distancing between Syria and Iran. Syrian Foreign Minister Walid al-Moualem said that the two sides were looking to reach an agreement about territory that Syria controlled before 1967. Turkey broke off the negotiations with Israel and Syria during the Gaza war.



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